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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Statement

On the historic occasion of the 50th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) takes this opportunity to again express its full and unequivocal support for the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA) and the outcomes of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly (Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century). WILPF has, since its inception in 1915, worked to prevent armed conflicts and to establish the conditions for sustainable peace on a global scale. As an NGO with ECOSOC consultative status, WILPF has participated in all of the United Nations sponsored World Conferences on Women and Sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women. WILPF marks its commitment and continued affirmation of the struggle for full recognition and fulfillment of women's human rights and security in all spheres and continues to work to ensure the participation of women in achieving these goals.

WILPF recognizes and applauds the efforts prior to and beyond the BPFA to ensure and enhance women's equal participation in decision making processes. This extends from the recognition in Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the right of equal political participation, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the basis provided in Articles 4, 7 and 8 thereof for initiatives to enhance women's equal participation in all areas of public life, to the urging in Security Council Resolution 1325 for Member States to ensure increased representation of women in the prevention, management and resolution of conflict, the 2003 General Assembly Resolution 58/142 on Women and Political Participation and the reiteration in the BPFA and the reviews thereof that "women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace."

WILPF notes, with some regret, that even in this historic 50th Session of the Commission, the successful achievement of the Commission's object of equal rights between men and women remains elusive. We hope that in designing its future program and methods of work the Commission will ensure the rapid and effective fulfillment of its mandate and that all Member States provide the necessary commitment and resources to make the achievement of gender equality a reality. WILPF encourages the adoption of specific, time-bound measurable targets to achieve the goal of equal participation.

To ensure the achievement of the goal of gender equality and to set a positive example, it is vital that it be pursued within the United Nations system itself. WILPF reiterates the call made by NGOs at the 49th Session of the Commission to more effectively pursue gender mainstreaming and to upgrade and better resource the gender architecture and related mechanisms within the United Nations. At the very least, the United Nations should set an example of gender balance and also urge and assist Member States to realize the as yet unattained BPFA goal of at least 30% women in decision making positions.

The themes under review by the Commission in this 50th Session are ones which are, in WILPF's view, interrelated, mutually reinforcing and vital to achieving gender equality. The Outcome of the 2005 World Summit illustrates the laudable recognition by States of this crucial link between participation, equality and development and that the full and effective implementation of the BPFA and outcome of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly "is an essential contribution to achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration."

WILPF calls on Member States to implement the Millennium Development Goals and broader development goals in a gender-centered manner, without which, eleven years beyond the BPFA, women's full and effective participation remains severely restricted.

We find it unacceptable that access to opportunities to work under humane and fair conditions and access to clean water and sanitation, health services and education remain beyond the reach of most women. We do not agree with the commodification and privatization of these essential services, especially in light of the resultant disproportionate negative impact on women of such policies. Unequal access to resources and the resultant unequal economic power and persistent and pervasive under-development is a form of violence in and of itself and, further, makes women particularly vulnerable

to violence both during conflict and so-called times of peace. Without inclusive and sustainable development based on a system of gender equality, true and sustainable peace is impossible. WILPF calls upon all states to therefore include a holistic gender perspective when allocating resources and developing programs to implement the MDGs and any other development practices or projects and insists that the CSW urge them to do so.

WILPF calls on Member States urgently to act to ensure that women and men have fair and equal access to natural, economic and political resources so as to ensure equal participation in decision making in the various areas of public and private life including participation in development. We call on governments to ensure that marginalized women, including widows, indigenous, disabled and minority women, are included in programs and processes designed to improve and enhance the access of women to these resources.

Furthermore, WILPF urges Member States to recognize the importance of women's participation in the policy decisions of government to achieve the goals of equitable distribution of resources and to facilitate this participation, including through gender mainstreaming and the adoption of temporary special measures to ensure women's participation in political and public life provided for in CEDAW and encouraged by that Committee's general recommendation 23 of 1997.

The challenges which remain in implementing the internationally agreed commitments on gender equality and empowerment highlight the importance of creating and ensuring an enabling environment for this and we call on national governments to take positive measures to institute policies, strategies and mechanisms to increase women's capabilities, assets and agency in the essential areas of education, health and work.

WILPF recognizes that the participation of women in decision making at all levels includes participation in economic and trade decisions and that the disproportionate negative effects of globalization on women makes their input in the decision making of supra-national institutions, such as the World Trade Organization and the other Bretton Woods Institutions, vital. WILPF calls on Member States to provide mechanisms by which women are guaranteed an opportunity to input into the decision-making processes of these institutions at a local level and that these processes take into account the particular needs of women.

We support and commend the recent establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission and recognize the important role it can play in ensuring lasting and sustainable peace. We urge the Peacebuilding Commission to take seriously the call in the resolution establishing the Commission (A/60/L.40) to integrate a gender perspective in all its work (Article 20) and to involve women's organizations in its activities (Article 21) both in the immediate post-conflict stage of the Commission's operation and as it moves into the development stage in post-conflict reconstruction, keeping in mind always the call in UNSCR 1325 "to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict."

WILPF emphasises the need for the United Nations system and Member States to recognize that violence against women, including sexual and gender-based violence and continuing impunity for such violence creates serious obstacles and challenges to the full and active participation of women in these and all other decision making processes. We urge all relevant actors, including those within the United Nations system, Member States and parties to armed conflict, to take special measures to protect women from all such forms of violence and for parties to armed conflict to respect fully international law as set out in Article 9 of UNSCR 1325 and to this end, support international and national courts (including the International Criminal Court) truth and reconciliation commissions and all other transitional justice mechanisms that pursue the goal of ending impunity.

As a 90 year old organization, WILPF reaffirms its commitment to work for collective human security and sustainable peace in collaboration with civil society, governmental and international actors, including within the United Nations system. We look forward to working with others around the world to dismantle the prevailing culture of militarism and create a culture of peace in which racism and discrimination, economic injustice, violence and every form of oppression are absent and in which women are full and equal participants.